

VESSELS OF WRATH FITTED FOR DESTRUCTION

TEXT: ROMANS 9:18-22

INTRODUCTION:

1. Tonight, I will speak on the subject of "the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction" (Rom. 9:22b).
2. These vessels are in contrast with the vessels of mercy (9:23).
3. I want to deal specifically with two important questions: Who are these vessels of wrath, and who hath fitted them for destruction?
4. It is obvious that the vessels of wrath fitted for destruction are lost men and women who will be cast into the lake of fire, where they will be punished in the horrible torments of hell for all eternity.
5. For the remainder of my message, I will attempt to answer my second question: Who has fitted them for destruction?

I. GOD HAS NOT FITTED THEM FOR DESTRUCTION BECAUSE GOD IS MERCIFUL

1. Some would object at this statement and insist that God is not merciful to the lost. They will point to Romans 9:15, and 18 and tell us that God has compassion and mercy on believers, but He hardens lost sinners. But is this what these verses are really teaching?
2. Not at all. First of all, God is merciful to "all" (Rom. 11:32). We can show sinners from the Bible that God most certainly is gracious and merciful. He does not want to send them to hell (cf. I Tim. 2:3, 4; II Peter 3:9).
3. If they reject the Gospel and turn their backs on God, they will certainly go straight to hell – but that will be their own fault, not God's.
4. Romans 9:15-18 teaches that God has mercy and compassion on lost sinners (9:15, 16). If He didn't, none of us would be here – we'd all be in hell. We all deserve God's judgment and wrath – "There is none righteous, no, not one" (Rom. 3:10).
5. Next, Paul refers to Pharaoh, the wicked king of the Egyptians, a proud and arrogant heathen who defied God (9:17, 18). Some try to minimize Pharaoh's sin by pointing out that God hardened his heart (9:18). But Pharaoh first hardened his own heart (cf. Ex. 5:1, 2).
6. Pharaoh repeatedly hardened his own heart, and then God hardened his heart as a judgment upon him. The same sun that melts the wax hardens the clay.
7. As I preach the Word of God week after week, I see two responses – some repent and get saved, while others harden themselves and refuse to yield to God.

8. There is an important principle – the same God who shows mercy to the humble and contrite, also hardens the proud and impenitent.
9. This hardening process is referred to many times in the book of Exodus. First, Pharaoh hardened his heart (Ex. 8:15, 19, 32; 9:7); then God hardened it for him (Ex. 9:12; 10:20, 27).
10. W.H. Griffith Thomas said, "Neither Pharaoh nor anyone else is ever created in order to be hardened, though secret disobedience on the part of a sinner may lead to his being made a public example, as was Pharaoh, of God's judicial displeasure against sin. The Apostle all along is dealing with human pride, and for this reason he does not in any way soften his statements" (*St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans*).
11. When God gives up on a man, he hardens his heart (Ex. 10:27-29). This principle is taught in Romans 1:24, 26, 28.
12. The Bible does not say that God is going to judge perverts for their uncleanness – it says that He already has judged them and their perversions are part of the judgment.
13. Romans 1:18 says, "the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men..."
14. It does not say, "will be revealed." God has already moved in judgment, though the ultimate judgment will not come till the lost are brought before the great white throne (Rev. 20:11-15).
15. Pharaoh was proud and obstinate, and so God had no choice but to judge him. God gave Pharaoh ample opportunity to repent, but Pharaoh hardened his heart.
16. God is longsuffering (cf. Romans 9:22); "longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (II Peter 3:9).
17. God acts with forbearance and mercy. Not one soul in hell can protest that he does not deserve to be there.
18. Therefore, we can say that God does not fit men for destruction, because God is merciful. In Romans 9:15, Paul quoted Exodus 33:19 (cf. Exodus 34:6-8).
19. Moses humbled himself – he bowed his head, he worshipped God (Exodus 34:8).
20. So God has not fitted them for destruction because God is merciful.

II. GOD HAS NOT FITTED THEM FOR DESTRUCTION BECAUSE GOD IS LONG-SUFFERING

1. Romans 9:22 says God "endured with much longsuffering" (Rom. 9:22).

2. The Bible says that God "is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (II Peter 3:9).
3. The word "endured" (9:22) implies opportunity to repent. The word "endured" implies that the destruction was not God's arbitrary choice, but theirs.
4. This same endurance teaches us that God was working – and still is working – not only to save the Jewish people from their sins, but also that He is carrying out a larger purpose – i.e., to save both Jews and Gentiles (9:23, 24, 30).
5. This aspect of God's program is developed further in the next two chapters (Romans 10 & 11).
6. God is longsuffering and merciful to all. He endures with patience and forbearance the wickedness and unbelief of hell-deserving sinners. It is dangerous and it is foolish for sinners to wear out God's patience.
7. *There is a tide in the affairs of men
Which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune;
Omitted, all the voyage of their life
Is found in shallows and miseries* – Shakespeare.

III. WICKED MEN HAVE FITTED THEMSELVES FOR DESTRUCTION

1. In the Bible, men are always responsible for their actions. If man sins willfully, if he wears out God's patience and forbearance, then he deserves the wrath of God (Rom. 2:3-6).
2. Many years ago, Charles Haddon Spurgeon preached this text and he said these words: "I speak with the deepest sorrow when I ask the question, with the probability, nay, the almost certainty that it must be answered in the affirmative – Are there not some of you here present, who are being fitted for destruction? God is not fitting you, you are fitting yourselves, by daily developing and indulging the depravity of your heart. You are seeking out every new pleasure, and every new sin, and though often warned to turn from your course of evil, are there not some of you who are rushing headlong to destruction? Are not many of you by a course of sin and folly, ripening yourselves for the great harvest of the Lord? Are you not making yourselves ready to be as stubble fully dried, cast into the oven of His wrath? This is not to be laid to the charge of God, but at your own door the guilt must lie" (*New Park Street Pulpit*, Vol. 6).
3. W.H. Griffith Thomas said, "The 'vessels of wrath' are described generally as 'fitted to destruction,' that is, fitted by themselves, through their own sin. On the other hand, the 'vessels of mercy' are described very significantly as those which 'He had afore prepared,' that is, God through His grace and

mercy prepared them. Men fit themselves for hell; but it is God that fits men for heaven" (*St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans*).

4. It might be helpful to point out here that in the original Greek, the verb "fitted" is in the middle voice, meaning they fitted themselves for destruction.
5. Good Bible study books bring this out. For example, *Vine's Expository Dictionary* says, "Here the middle voice signifies that those referred to fitted themselves for destruction (as illustrated in the case of Pharaoh...)"
6. The expanded edition of the Ryrie Study Bible says they were "ripe for destruction because of their own actions of rejecting the truth."
7. And what does this destruction entail? Not a cessation of being, but eternal torment in the lake of fire; weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth.

CONCLUSION:

1. Paul illustrates his point by using the figure of a potter (representing God), forming the clay (Romans 9:20-22).
2. The word "formed" is different than the word "created." Paul is not referring to the original creation of man; he is referring to spiritual destination (9:21, 22).
3. God takes men as He finds them, just as the potter does not create the clay, but uses it and molds it.